

CARL J. BENNETT,

Plaintiff,

v.

CAROLYN W. COLVIN,
Acting Commissioner of Social Security,

Defendant.

On December 16, 2014, Magistrate Judge Gates issued a Memorandum and Recommendation (“M&R”) [D.E. 32]. In that M&R, Judge Gates recommended that the court deny plaintiff’s motion for judgment on the pleadings [D.E. 27], grant defendant’s motion for judgment on the pleadings [D.E. 29], and affirm defendant’s final decision. On December 30, 2014, plaintiff filed objections to the M&R [D.E. 33]. Defendant did not file a response.

“The Federal Magistrates Act requires a district court to make a de novo determination of those portions of the [magistrate judge’s] report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made.” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Accident Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310, 315 (4th Cir. 2005) (alteration in original) (emphasis and quotation omitted); see 28 U.S.C. § 636(b). Absent a timely objection, “a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.” Diamond, 416 F.3d at 315 (quotation omitted).

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The court has reviewed de novo the portions of the M&R to which plaintiff objected. The scope of judicial review of a final decision regarding disability benefits under the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(g), is limited to determining whether substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's factual findings and whether the Commissioner applied the correct legal standards. See, e.g., Reid v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 769 F.3d 861, 865 (4th Cir. 2014); Walls v. Barnhart, 296 F.3d 287, 290 (4th Cir. 2002); Hays v. Sullivan, 907 F.2d 1453, 1456 (4th Cir. 1990). Substantial evidence is evidence which a reasonable mind "might accept as adequate to support a conclusion." Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971) (quotation omitted). It "consists of more than a mere scintilla of evidence but may be less than a preponderance." Smith v. Chater, 99 F.3d 635, 638 (4th Cir. 1996). This court may not reweigh the evidence or substitute its judgment for that of the Commissioner. See, e.g., Craig v. Chater, 76 F.3d 585, 589 (4th Cir. 1996); Hays, 907 F.2d at 1456. Rather, in determining whether substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's decision, the court's review is limited to whether the Commissioner analyzed the relevant evidence and sufficiently explained her findings and rationale concerning the evidence. See, e.g., Sterling Smokeless Coal Co. v. Akers, 131 F.3d 438, 439–40 (4th Cir. 1997).

Plaintiff objects that Judge Gates incorrectly analyzed Bird v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec., 699 F.3d 337 (4th Cir. 2012), in failing to reject the ALJ's analysis of the Veterans Administration rating of unemployability. This court disagrees with plaintiff's objection and agrees with Judge Gates's analysis of Bird and the record. See M&R 6–11. Thus, the court overrules the objection. Likewise, the court overrules plaintiff's objection concerning his RFC. Both Judge Gates and the ALJ applied the proper legal standard and adequately explained their findings. See M&R 11–13. Moreover, substantial evidence supports the ALJ's analysis. See id. Accordingly, the court adopts the M&R and overrules the objections.

In sum, plaintiff's objections to the M&R [D.E. 33] are OVERRULED, plaintiff's motion for judgment on the pleadings [D.E. 27] is DENIED, defendant's motion for judgment on the pleadings [D.E. 29] is GRANTED, defendant's final decision is AFFIRMED, and this action is DISMISSED. The clerk shall close the case.

SO ORDERED. This 17 day of January 2015.


JAMES C. DEVER III
Chief United States District Judge